

Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013)

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The committee adopted the report by Jerzy BUZEK (EPP-ED, PL) amending - under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure - the proposed decision on the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013). The committee endorsed the overall structure of FP7 but adopted many amendments aimed at bringing the programme's budget into line with the agreement on the Financial Perspective, encouraging the participation of SMEs, boosting the position of young researchers and women, turning the European Research Council into a permanent, independent structure, tackling ethical issues such as the use of human embryonic stem cells, and clarifying the priorities for financing under FP7. The key amendments were as follows:

- to bring the FP7 budget into line with the Financial Perspective, the maximum indicative overall EU funding for the seven-year programme should be EUR 50 862 million compared to the EUR 72 726 million originally proposed by the Commission. MEPs also modified the allocation of these funds among the different parts of the specific programmes, reducing the budget of most of the research themes by 30%, with the exception of energy, socio-economic research, food, agriculture and biotechnology, which were cut to a lesser extent;
- certain fields of research should not be financed under FP7: human cloning for reproductive purposes; research intended to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes heritable; and research intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer. However, MEPs said that research on the use of human stem cells, both adult and embryonic, may be financed "depending both on the contents of the scientific proposal and the legal framework of the Member State(s) involved". As regards the use of human embryonic stem cells, the amendment stressed that institutions, organisations and researchers must be subject to strict licensing and control in accordance with the legal framework of the Member State(s) involved. The fields of research should be reviewed in the second phase of the programme in the light of scientific advances;
- the Framework Programme should be kept under "continuous and systematic review", and the Commission should carry out not just one evaluation in 2010 as proposed but at least two interim assessments (in 2009 and 2011), following which it should propose modifications to the objectives and research activities where appropriate;
- the thematic area "Security and Space" should be split into two separate headings ("Security" and "Space"), so that there would be ten thematic areas in total rather than nine as laid down in the Commission's proposal;
- a number of amendments sought to secure the involvement of SMEs, inter alia through "practical support measures accompanied by quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the objectives achieved". SMEs should also be given better access to pre-funding. If SME-specific instruments become over-subscribed, the financing of the various FP7 instruments should be reviewed with the aim of directing funding "towards those instruments in demand". One amendment introduced a system of "knowledge vouchers" for SMEs to support the dissemination of knowledge;

- steps should be taken to encourage young researchers, support the early stages of their scientific careers and reduce the “brain drain”, e.g. through reintegration grants;

- lastly, the committee wanted the proposed European Research Council to enjoy real autonomy and therefore suggested that it be initially set up as an Executive Agency that would then become an independent structure established under the codecision procedure. The ERC’s administrative and staffing costs should account for no more than 3% of its annual budget.